DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 202 151 EA 013 604

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TITLE School Site Budgeting: Abstracting the Literature.
PUB DATE Feb 81
NOTE 23p.; A project for the Education Panel of the Cincinnatus Association.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Administrator Role; Advisory Committees; Annotated Bibliographies; Board Administrator Relationship; Board of Education Role; *Budgeting; Community Involvement; *Decentralization; Decision Making; Elementary Secondary Education; *Institutional Autonomy; Power Structure; Principals; *Resource Allocation; School Administration; School Responsibility
IDENTIFIERS *District School Relationship; *School Site Budgeting

ABSTRACT

School site budgeting may be said to exist when the school board and central office administration provide principals, in consultation with staff and sometimes community representatives, with an opportunity to prepare a budget for the allocation of resources at the school level. The objectives of school based budgeting include achieving more efficient use of resources; providing schools and instructional programs with needed flexibility; encouraging examination of the relationships among program objectives, program outcomes, and costs; and giving greater decision making responsibility to those most familiar with students' problems--principals, teachers, and parents. The implications, strengths, and potential problems of school site budgeting, as addressed in the literature, are summarized in this document. A briefly annotated bibliography of over forty relevant items concludes the report. (Author/PGD)

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SCHOOL SITE BUDGETING:

ABSTRACTING THE LITERATURE

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A Project for the Education Panel
of the Cincinnatus Association

February, 1981

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EA 013 604

In the spring of 1980 initiatives were taken by the Cincinnati School District to implement the concept of local school site budgeting. Late in the spring, a group of citizens was impaneled to oversee the process. In the summer and fall the first steps were taken to flesh out the concept and begin the process in a small number of schools. This literature review, prepared by three members of the Education Panel of The Cincinnatus Association, is an outgrowth of that policy initiative. The impetus for preparing such a review grew out of Cincinnatus' interest in a presentation which would describe the concept of school site budgeting for its membership: the preparation of this more formal document is a reflection of our perception of the desire of the Cincinnati School District citizen's committee overseeing school site budgeting, and, we believe, also the local site committees, for a more systematic presentation of the experience of others.

In preparing a report such as this, certain basic decisions had to be made. For example, in deciding whether the review was to meet the canons of scholarship or the needs of citizens and practitioners we answered by coming down firmly on the citizen/practitioner side. We have, however, cited our sources. The bibliography at the end, annotated in order that those who wish to pursue the literature further may profit from our judgment as to which pieces were the most helpful, does indicate the range of materials utilized in preparing the summary review. Second, we want to stress that this document should not be read as a specific set of suggestions or recommendations on what should happen in Cincinnati. Rather, it is an attempt to put before those who are interested or feel they have a need to know, what we have been

able to sift from the published materials in this area. We would add that the materials were not especially easy to come by. They are scattered across the country, in a variety of different journals, and while there are now beginning to be some attempts to pull together the literature, in part in response to inquiries we made in connection with our effort here, the material is still, in very large measure what scholars like to refer to as "fugitive."

The summary begins with definitions of school site budgeting and descriptions of related functions. We then present what we learned about the assumptions and rationale underlying the proposal. We move to descriptions of the roles of key actors in school site budgeting. Finally, we conclude with observations, implications, and possible problems arising from implementation of the concept.

I. School Site Budgeting and Related Functions

Budgeting is the primary mechanism for planning and controlling educational activities. It directly affects teachers' salaries, the availability of supplies, and building maintenance; but it also indirectly affects important decisions about what is taught, how, and by whom. School site budgeting may be said to exist when the school board and central office administration provide principals, in consultation with staff and sometimes community representatives, with an opportunity to prepare a budget for the allocation of resources at the school level. School site budgeting may be said to be present when discretion to allocate funds across a variety of budget categories according to priorities established at the local level in fact exists. School site budgeting requires both delegation of authority down to the local school and actual utilization of that power by the local school. It should be clear that whoever prepares the school site budget will have to do so within collective agreements, curriculum guidelines, Board policies and state regulations. It should also be clear that school site budgeting does not remove responsibility from the school board for preparing the school district budget.

School site budgeting often deals only with equipment, supplies, and services. It can extend to the choice of the kinds of personnel working within the school. It can even extend to all the funds awarded to a school however they are calculated, with complete freedom to allocate them. The extent of the decision capacity delegated to the local school is one of the key decisions that must be made by the school district in adopting school site budgeting.

In the literature, school site budgeting is rarely discussed as an end in itself. It is often linked with other concepts and functions, such as principal accountability, cost accounting at the local level, allocation of staff, shared decision-making, school-by-school curriculum planning, school performance reports, and parent or citizen advisory committees. School site budgeting is almost always understood as a part of school-based management. School site budgeting does not take place in a vacuum. Rather, it is a convenient tool for achieving broader school-based management in which principals, teachers, and parents share in making decisions they are ultimately responsible for implementing together.

II. Assumptions and Rationale

The concept of school site budgeting, of course, did not spring out of thin air. It grows out of the fiscal crisis affecting public education since the time of the late 1960's, a crisis which has placed a premium on developing decision-making mechanisms that can differentiate between policies and programs that are necessary and those that are not. Paralleling the fiscal crisis has been a desire to increase public participation in school governance policies. Controlling costs and renewing the commitment of parents, the public, and professionals have been prime motivating factors.

The available literature suggests a considerable range of principles and assumptions underlying the move to school site budgeting. For example, if

ironically, strong action by central governments is seen as necessary for the promotion and nuturing of local, grassroots democracy. A second principle is that problems need to be solved as near as possible to the setting of the problem. A third is that involvement brings a more rapid and complete implementation of solutions. A fourth principle is that people have worth and talents and that those talents, under existing organizational and decision patterns, are typically under-used.

The objectives of school based budgeting include providing principals, teachers, and parents with appropriate roles in budgeting, achieving more efficient use of resources, providing schools and instructional programs with needed flexibility, and encouraging examination of the relationship between program objectives, program outcomes, and costs.

Another way of looking at the assumptions underlying school based budgeting is to divide them into two categories, assumptions having to do with human nature generally and those having to do with organizational development.

In the first category can be included the ideas that everyone is to be trusted and that people prefer to feel important and needed. Further, in the main, people involved in institutions are in fact operating well above the level of simply striving for security and safety and that people prefer responsibility to dependency. Finally, school based budgeting is seen as responding to the universally recognized principle of involving in decision-making those affected by decisions. As such, it is seen as a major contribution to positive morale.

The organizational development assumptions are of a somewhat different, though related, sort. The observable phenomena of human diversity and uniqueness are also another part of the rationale underlying local site budgeting. We know that the administrators in a building are unique, that the teachers, learners and parents there are uniquely different individuals. We expect,

therefore, that there ought to be a good deal of flexibility to allow those differences to express themselves in the most productive fashion. Thus, individual solutions are needed because of unique situations.

Decentralization, furthermore, is desirable because decisions are needed frequently and it is difficult to get those decisions made if they have to be made at the center. A third reason for decentralizing decisions to the local school site is because decisions often need to be made quickly, and they can be made more quickly if they are made at the local site.

School site budgeting is seen as providing a reasonably rational system through which teachers could come to be assigned appropriate loads and allocated resources based upon instructional need. It is also seen as serving to reduce the growing we/they syndrome promoted historically by school management and the more recent collective bargaining trends.

Decentralization of decision making at the local school site requires that confidence be placed in individuals to make decisions. A basic assumption, therefore, is that educators and parents are competent, that they are knowledgeable or can become so quickly, and have the necessary problem identification and problem-solving skills or can acquire them.

Decentralized decision making in a school district requires that all segments of a school community develop a tolerance and enthusiasm for diversity. While there should be agreed-upon common basic goals and objectives for the district as a whole, if decentralization is to work, there must be willingness to accept considerable amounts of diversity in the character of individual schools.

Another way of looking at school-site management or school site budgeting is to see it as a participative management, a philosophy that entails making decisions at the lowest possible level and as close to the scene of action as possible. The participation is necessary in order to learn how

far down a decision should be made and also how far down it can be made, as well as which managers must share in the decision and which must be informed of it. Participative management means that before making a decision affecting individuals, they are entitled to be heard as to what they think of the decision and how they perceive its effects. After a decision, they are entitled to an explanation for the reasons for that decision.

In the final analysis, school site budgeting is based on four central beliefs. The first is that those who are more familiar with student's problems - principals, teachers, and parents - should have greater responsibility for the decision making about the education of the children. Second, parent involvement in their children's education is essential for improving educational quality. Third, by dividing districts into school units the opportunities for parent participation are increased, while the scope of education problems considered and the number of people involved at any one meeting are reduced. And finally, by involving school-level personnel in more decisions, the likelihood of those decisions being effectively implemented is increased.

III. Roles in School Site Budgeting

As might be expected in any movement such as altering the presently existing balance of arrangements for budgeting, a great proportion of the literature pertains to a description of the respective roles of possible participants. The role discussions feature three main groups of participants - principals, parents and community representatives, and central administrators and the Board.

A. The Role of the Principal

Until recently, principals and staff were not directly involved in the school district budgeting process. Supplies and equipment were requisitioned annually from central administrative stores. Decisions about allocations, types of equipment, and placing orders were under the purview of central administrative staff. Principals had virtually no role in reallocating within a relatively small number of budget "lines" determined centrally and transmitted to principals for implementation.

The literature broadly agrees, however, that the role of the principal is critical to the success of school-site budgeting and school-site management. Furthermore, that role is conceived as a strong one. School site budgeting makes principals the "front-line decision makers" in the school system. The principal must recognize, however, that school-based management involves decision making within defined parameters rather than complete autonomy from the total system. Decentralization does not mean weakening of the center; on the contrary it requires strong guidance in the form of clear and meaningful objectives for the system.

Implicit in the notion of decentralization coupled with clear statement of system goals is the notion that building principals are to be held accountable for the results of instructional programs in their buildings. In the context of those clearly stated system goals the obligations on the building principal include: 1) selecting objectives and the strategies for achieving those objectives; 2) selecting strategies for involving teachers in a decision-making process; 3) involving members of the community in the budget development process responsive to the community's needs; 4) methods of informing the community about decisions made; 5) the method of allocating resources within his/her education unit; 6) the selection of instructional materials and equipment; 7) the deployment of professional and classified personnel.

Selection, assignment, training, and transfer of personnel should be school level decisions according to much of the literature. Curriculum planning, development, and evaluation also affect the way services are delivered and should be school based. Most budgeting decisions about how funds are to be used to provide services can also be made locally.

The role of the principal is that of an educational manager. That does not mean that the principal becomes a little superintendent who makes decisions and passes those decisions down to the classroom teachers to be implemented. Being a manager means working with teachers, students, parents, and the community and the central district administration in developing and administering the school program. The emphasis is not so much on principal power as it is on shared decision making.

To assure reasonable success in school based management, principals will need to be competent in four important areas: personnel management, program management, public relations, and budgeting. Authority to hire personnel is essential if the principal is to be held accountable for the schools' performance, since the classroom teacher remains the critical link in the education process. The principal's responsibilities as program manager involve assessing the educational preferences of the community and the requirements of students in the school, establishing educational objectives for the students, matching the skills and interests of teachers with the educational requirements and styles of students, developing ways of assessing the achievement of classroom objectives, monitoring the performance of teachers and students, and reporting on the successes and failures to the community and district. Competence in public relations requires the ability to learn about the preferences and concerns of the citizenry and providing citizens with information to help them make decisions about the school's educational programs. Principals will need to learn to work with parent groups and citizen's councils as deliberative and

decision-making groups, not just as an administrative arm of the principal's office. Principals will need to know more about educational law so that they can represent the interest of the parents and students rather than merely telling them to see the district's lawyer. The principal must learn to represent the interests of school teachers, parents, students and the community in negotiations with central office administrators. Finally, under school based management principals must also become financial managers. Power follows dollars and principals, in order to have the authority to make decisions, must also have some control over the school budget.

Implicit in the comments about the relationship of the principal in his or her role and the activities of citizen advisory committees is the obligation on the principal to provide, perhaps in conjunction with the central administration, sufficient resources and other logistical measures to support the activities of the advisory committees.

B. Advisory Committees

Three broad types of educational decisions are perceived to benefit or, indeed, require citizen input. These include the selection of the school principal, the allocation of dollars to programs in schools, and the adoption of school organization patterns. In respect to types of citizen participation, whether on these three broad areas or others, it has been possible to distinguish between several different levels of participation. These range all the way from the maximum, or citizen control, to the minimum of therapy or manipulation. In between are such token functions as placating, consulting, and informing and the more substantial modes of participation referred to as delegated power and partnership. On one point most of the authors agree: school based budgeting for management must involve a meaningful parent or parent/community school partnership.* One of the important roles of a school advisory

*The literature exhibits some ambiguity respecting who the non-education people are on advisory or budget councils. For some, it is just parents. For others, it is parents and representatives of other community interests.

committee in respect to budget is understanding that they are not "voting" on the school budget but recommending or advising on it. In the final analysis, the decision must rest with the principal. The principal, is however, expected to elicit input by a variety of means from staff members, parents, and possibly even students in the course of developing a school's budget proposal.

A key role for school advisory councils in South Carolina is the preparation of the school reports. This is a document that annual presents the programs offered for each type of student in the schools, the needs of each type of student in the school, the goals and objectives for the school, and how money is being spent to meet the needs of students.

In the course of identifying the needs of each type of student in the school there are, of course, a number of key steps to be taken. One of these is finding out what parents, students, and the community want from students' education. What kind of job should the schools be doing? Second is recognizing possible problems that keep the schools from doing the job they should. A third step is understanding the problem or finding the facts. And a fourth step is finding out what causes the problem. Various ways have been identified for helping advisory committees identify needs, problems, and the causes of problems. For example, think sessions or brain-storming meetings can be held. Public hearings can be held. A community conference can be staged. Observations can be made of what is going on in the school. Information that is routinely collected about the schools by various sources can be examined. Or parents, students, teachers, or other people in the community could be surveyed to identify needs, problems, or causes of problems. Materials prepared to help advisory councils in South Carolina strongly cautioned against taking on too much. Councils are urged to pick a few of the most important problems to study.

In particular, advisory councils are urged to be clear about the purposes they are to have and how their mambership is to be formed. The organization

of the council is an important matter to attend to including how its officers are to be defined and chosen and how its meetings are to be determined, scheduled, and organized. Whether or not the council will function with committees and whether there is to be staff and finances or logistical support are important to determine. Most importantly if there are any possible restrictions on council activities these should be carefully delineated.

Both Florida and California laws require councils to prepare annual performance reports which are widely distributed in the community. Those reports vary in content and methods of preparation but they ought to include information about the school, the school staff, student performance, program strengths and program deficiency, and surveys and opinions about the school from parents, teachers, and students. Various techniques are employed in developing such reports including council-prepared-by-themselves and council-and-school-staff-working-jointly.

C. School Board and Central Administration

There are several key roles for the school board and central administration staff. Those roles arise out of the reality that decentralization is not an absolute but, in fact, a balance. Certain things can be decentralized only if other things are centralized. Authority to make a budget at the local level can occur only if there is a clear finance policy and adequate control over total expenditures at the center.

Perhaps the first and most important role for the board and central administration is coming to a determination as to exactly what kinds of decisions are to be decentralized for budgeting and management purposes.

A second role is the determination of what kinds of system-wide goals, objectives, and policies will be promulgated and expected to be followed in the local sites.

Decentralization and delegation of responsibilities to building admini-

strators will allow central office personnel to devote more time to setting broad goals and directions for the system, review of building objectives, review of the evaluation process, testing, research curriculum development and communications, all tasks which are seen to be given too short shrift. The role of the Board of Education is to develop broad policies for the operation of the education enterprise. Decentralization permits the full realization of the notion that "it is not the business of the Board of Education to run the schools but to see that they are well run." The decision to decentralize is, of course, a policy of the first order. The Board does not, in fact, relinquish any of its authority to fix the total budget.

One of the key monitoring responsibilities of central administration is assuring that the advisory councils established at each school are adequately trained and supported so that the functions they must carry out can be implemented successfully. This support may take the form of training opportunities, consultation help, and reassurance that what ever logistical support needs to be provided is, in fact, made available.

One of the writers made the point that decentralization of budgeting and management responsibilities to school sites would have the effect of shifting management's preoccupation with control to the evaluation of program effectiveness and related overall program improvement policies and procedures.

All these notions of Board and central administration role might be summarized by saying that the Board's primary function is to be the source of the goals for the institutions in their charge. These are appropriately called policy statements about what schools ought to do. The function, then, of the central administration becomes a kind of devil's advocate for both the board and the school level staffs. They raise questions "why do you think youngsters should learn that given the conditions of this community?" They ask of the staff "why is that the best way in which youngsters can learn a specific kind

of thing?" "Why do you allocate your funds in that manner?" They become testers for the what and the how.

One of the most vital technical questions, but one that is intimately connected to the crucial questions of what decisions to decentralize and what not, is the manner in which funds will be budgeted to each school site. There are, of course, numerous ways in which this can be accomplished. It can be on a dollar cost per pupil. It can be in terms of staff positions and appropriate support-cost allocations. It can be more complicated in terms of differential allocations depending upon educational need of the students attending the school. It can be on the basis of previous patterns of expenditures in each school. It can be on the basis of some kind of budgetary "constructs" like the so called "educational equivalents" (see Monahan and Johnson, pp.38 ff and Caldwell and Hodgson, p.3). This calculation, however it is done, is of crucial importance and will require not just the calculation of financial allocations but also the exercise of judgment. For example, should a school be credited with the dollar cost of its staff or the personnel equivalent? Clearly, the question being raised here is whether it is fair to a school to show its budget as being substantially higher when that figure is a consequence of teachers with greater seniority than elsewhere in the system. But is a more experienced teacher a more valuable one? If so, then a school's budget should reflect that.

IV. Implications

Notwithstanding the power of the justification and rationale for the local site budgeting and the amount of helpful material pertaining to the definition of roles for the several actors in the local site budgeting approach to decentralized management, there were a number of possible implications and problems that ought to be addressed in interests of rounding out the picture.

These are listed below:

1. How define the roles of school advising or budgeting committees such that they are distinct from existing committees, the district school board, and the PTA?

2. Communication between the school advising or budget councils and their respective communities will not be easy.

3. Even if the role of the school budget committees is fully described, there still may be doubts, uncertainties, or disagreement with the role as defined.

4. At least in the beginning, there may be difficulties in keeping the school budget councils on an effective time table.

5. The decentralization of decision making for budget and school management may run into difficulties in the absence of an effective system for monitoring school performance.

6. The implications of decentralized decision making for collective bargaining are quite extensive. These include at least:
   a. the possible inclusion of certain school-specific provisions in the contract (like General Motors' local plant agreement supplementing and master contract).
   b. the intersection between certain of the kinds of authority that principals will need to have at the building level and provisions in the master agreement.

7. Perhaps the most difficult task for proponents of school based management will be to describe clearly what the appropriate role of central school administration is to be.

8. Important questions may arise over the extent to which elaborate or, indeed, overgrown state education codes and laws prevent making the kinds of decisions that ought to be made in the interest of children's learning at given school sites. This extends not only to the regulation of schools themselves, but also certification requirements, regulation of textbook adoption, course content, and the like.

9. Without superintendent support for school based management, there is little chance of it being implemented because of the superintendent's control over the flow of information in the district.

10. Nationally and in many states there are programs of a categorical nature which are delivered directly to individual schools. Integrating these programs into an overall decentralized authority for decision making will require ingenuity and skill.

11. One of the most difficult changes to bring about at the center is one of attitude. Traditional values related to a directing role for district staff as opposed to a supporting function may be difficult to overcome.

12. The district's, the public's, and the state's posture on the diversification of programs likely to result from the decentralization of decision making is something to watch.

13. How tendencies to stray away from a district-wide philosophy and goals will be handled will have a bearing on the success of the implementation of local site budgeting. One of the most important of these is the constitutional requirements associated with racial desegregation.

14. Actors of many kinds in this new arrangement will not be trained at the outset and will need to be trained if the approach is to be successful.

15. This entire review of the literature can also be understood as a set of specifications for training local school officials and advisory boards. Both will need training in more than just the techniques of school site budgeting. Just as important are an understanding of why school site budgeting will help, where there may be resistance, and how to help people change.

16. Mistakes will be made. That is to be expected. Consideration of staff changes, however, ought to be made only when a pattern of mistakes develops.

17. Conversely, decentralization of decision making should be sold on the basis of the positive gains to be achieved from it, not through allegations of administrative incompetence.

18. Experience in other states suggests that major problems encountered by central office personnel were concerns about the number of items to be decentralized, the resistance of some subject supervisors, violation of guidelines by schools, differences with school personnel in interpreting program budget classifications, and difficulties in providing accurate and timely financial information to schools.

19. Major problems encountered by principals concerned their own role and technical difficulties in the administration phase of the budgeting process. Increased workload as well as lack of skills, experience and guidelines were frequent concerns related to role. Information was occasionally a problem as were issues related to the nature of teacher involvement, being perceived variously as too high or too low.

20. Canadian experience leads to the suggestions that systems contemplating the adoption of school site budgeting should apprecaite (1) the complexity of the change, (2) the need for a comprehensive array of inservice programs, and (3) the importance of first establishing an adequate cost accounting and management information system.

21. Power struggles may occur as groups within the school jockey for control.

22. Experience at several sites suggests that teachers may not always want to become involved in the decision-making process.

23. The added responsibility of some aspects of budget control demands that staff members improve other organizational features such as decision making and communication.

24. Local site budgeting requires local site long-range planning and careful evaluation of all activities.

25. Comprehensive change can bring out both the intense opposition of those who would lose by the change and incredulity among those who would be helped.

26. Because of the collective bargaining implications associated with school site budgeting a possible source of opposition may come from union leaders, and, of course, if union opposition is strong, it may prove fatal to school site management.

27. All elements and levels of the entire system (although not necessarily all the schools in a district simultaneously) must prepare to undergo change at the same time (or nearly so), training must be provided, and people ought not to assume that the process can be anything other than gradual.

28. How the central office handles situations where schools, originally budgeted at certain amounts, have enrollments that do not justify fully the original budget, will be critical in determining the overall success district wide.

29. When we speak of "autonomy" in local school site budgeting what we really mean is autonomy within limitations placed by state laws, professional organizations, tradition, money, and other factors. As a school progresses further into decentralization, it will become increasingly desirous of removing these limitations. It is predicted as the decentralizations movement gains momentum, that increased pressure will be placed on external constraining agents to permit local schools to achieve their own purposes and programs.

30. The people in Cincinnati with the most experience in school site budgeting are the Catholic schools. They have long had decentralized budgeting, but are now moving to separate parish and school budgets and to shift budget making for the school from the pastor to the principal and education commission. The archdiocesan education office publishes some helpful brief mimeographed "how to" papers on budgeting which are listed in our bibliography.

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A superintendent's view of the Florida experience.

School Advisory Council Activity Guides (South Carolina)

Below are listed nine booklets prepared by the University of South Carolina to assist local schools and districts in school site budgeting.

Beach, Mary L., Understanding and Assessing School Programs, 1979, 35 pp

Carpenter, Carl A., Setting Program Goals and Objectives, 1979, 22 pp.

Cooper, Lynne E., Local School Advisory Councils: How They Operate and What They Can Do to Improve Education, 1978, 29 pp.

Cooper, Lynne E., Needs Assessment, 1979, 22 pp.

Hendrix, Clelia D., Communicating with the Community, 1979, 17 pp.

Jackson, Mary C. and Sovde, Joy E., a Handbook for Preparing the Annual School Report, 1980, 44 pp.

Jackson, Mary C. and Sovde, Joy E., Interpreting and Using Test Results, 1980, 52 pp.

Jensen, Edith W., Making Group Decisions, 1978, 16 pp.

Peterson, Terry, Budgeting for Schools, 1978, 21 pp.

Powell, Conrad, Improving Communications Within the Council, 1979, 22 pp.

Winecoff, Larry, Clarifying School Advisory Council Roles, 1978, 19 pp.

South, Oron, Diffusing a System, Education and Urban Society, Vol. 8, No 2, February, 1976, Sage Publications, 13 pp.
Describes organizational development process in same county as Deane

Wells, Barbara, and Carr, Larry, "With the Pursestrings Comes the Power," Thrust (for Educational Leadership), November, 1978, 2 pp.
Local responses to implementation of decentralization in Fairfield-Suisan Unified School District, California

Zerchykov, Ross and Davies, Don, with Chrispeels, Janet, Leading the Way: State Mandates for School Advisory Councils in California, Florida, and South Carolina, Institute for Responsive Education, 1980, 157 pp.
Analysis of three state programs which make local school budgeting possible, if not necessary. Sections on "clarifying intents" and "co-production" are especially helpful.
Focus is on national experience of advisory councils, evaluation strategy of California, education improvement grants in Florida, and needs and goals clarification in South Carolina.

Interested readers are also referred to the package of materials prepared by and available from the Association of California School Administrators to help educators and others develop a wide range of skills associated with the implementation of advisory councils and school site management.